

III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Smith Hill is within Roger Williams's Grand Purchase from the sachems Canonicus and Miantinomi. Before the first European settlers arrived, the area including Smith Hill lay between the lands of the Narragansett and Wampanoag Tribes, both part of the larger Algonquin nation. The Indians left no traceable impact upon Smith Hill, neither trails, habitation sites, nor particular land forms which are known by Indian names; however, the area contains several attributes that would have favored the presence of aboriginal man.

The immediate post-glacial environment in this area about 10,000 years ago probably included the earliest human inhabitants, small groups of nomadic hunters who followed migratory herds of caribou and other large game through sub-arctic spruce forests.

By the Middle Archaic period, between 6000 and 4000 years ago, human populations expanded as a temperate environment similar to today's became established. Seasonal runs of salmon and shad began to frequent the rivers as the sea rose to approach the contemporary level. Although no sites for this period have been recorded in the Providence River area, similar locations were favored elsewhere in New England. During the Late Archaic Period, which lasted until about 3000 years ago, modern estuaries and tidal flats developed, and human populations began to exploit shellfish as an important food resource throughout favorable coastal regions of New England.

Coastal settlement and the increased use of shellfish are even more characteristic of the Woodland period (2600-400 years ago). The likelihood of continuous human utilization of the Smith Hill area during this time is considerable. Historical descriptions report an abundance of shellfish and shad and salmon in the salt cove and Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers. In addition, maps of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries indicate that several Indian trails converged in the general vicinity. The Pawtucket and Louquassuck trails entered the area

from the north, the Pequot trail from the west, the Wampanoag trail from the east, and the Watchemoket trail from the southeast.

Early colonial accounts of settlement do not describe Indian settlements in the area; this might be explained by the great plague of 1616-1617 which depopulated many coastal regions of New England. At the time of contact with European settlers the major Narragansett villages were located in South County rather than the Providence area. Given the intensive development of Smith Hill in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is unlikely that archeological remains from any prehistoric cultural period have survived intact.

When Roger Williams and his band of followers settled at present-day Providence in 1636, the group built their homes on the eastern banks of the Providence and Moshassuck Rivers, along what is now North and South Main Streets on the East Side. The area west of the Moshassuck River, including Smith Hill, was common land used for farming and grazing livestock. The Early Records of Providence chronicle the setting aside, in 1658, of the land north of the Woonasquatucket River, including what is now Smith Hill, as the "stated common" for use by Providence residents.

While Smith Hill itself was set aside as common ground, at its eastern edge was the falls of the Moshassuck River, and here (near the present-day Stillman White Foundry at the intersection of Charles and Bark Streets) was begun Providence's first industry, a gristmill operated for the community by John Smith. Smith, who emigrated from Dorchester, England, was banished from Salem along with Williams and came to Providence in 1636. By 1638, he had erected a combination dwelling and mill on the western side of the Moshassuck River (near present-day Mill Street).

The land occupied by Providence's first miller remained in the Smith family until well into the eighteenth century. The Smiths' receiving a large eastern part of the common when it was finally divided in the eighteenth century and their continuing settlement led to the area's

identification with the Smith family: "up on the hill by the Smiths" which eventually became "Smith Hill."

By the late 1720s, the growth of small communities at Olneyville and Tripptown (now Manton) and the need for highways connecting them with the compact part of town brought the first roads across Smith Hill. Before 1729, a road to Olneyville was completed (following present-day Orms and Valley Streets). In 1729, the southern branch of the route through the stated common was constructed (along the course of Douglas and Chalkstone Avenues) to Tripptown. Four years later, the northern branch was completed (along Douglas Avenue and Eaton Street). Later in the century, a short street known as Broad Lane (now Smith Street) was opened at least as far as the then North Providence town line near today's I-95.

The first construction on Smith Hill occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century. in spite of the early decision to maintain the land north of the Woonasquatucket River as common ground, in 1746 the Town Council granted to the heirs of John Smith the land lying between present-day Orms and Smith Streets. This land was platted into House lots for the Smith heirs by Stephen Jackson in 1754, but as late as 1798 the tax rolls indicate that only a handful of modest houses had been built, including the dwelling which stood at 55 Davis Street into the 1930s. The area was to remain sparsely populated until the mid nineteenth century, and domestic construction was largely limited to the country retreats of inhabitants of the compact part of town.



Fig. 6: House (18th Century): 55 Davis Street; Photograph, 1931



Fig 7: Esek Hopkins House (1754 et seq.) 97 Admiral Street; photograph, ca 1900.
 Courtesy of the [Rhode Island Historical Society](#): RHi x3 2170.

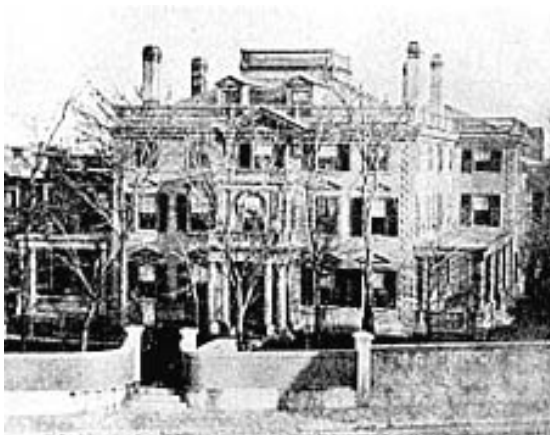


Fig. 8: Colonel Benjamin Smith House;(ca 1800) 133 Smith Street; photograph, ca 1930; demolished, 1926. [Courtesy of the Rhode Island Historical Society](#): RHi x3 2172.



Fig. 9: Zachariah Allen House (ca 1770); 151 Orms Street; photograph, ca 1930; demolished. The porch and street-level storefronts are later 19th-century additions

One such place remains; the oldest extant structure on Smith Hill is the Esek Hopkins House at 97 Admiral Street. Today, the setting of the gambrel-roof dwelling retains some of the rural character of the area in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when the land was divided among a few families. Hopkins seems never to have farmed his land, but rather enjoyed it for its pastoral isolation.

The grandest of the early houses was the Federal mansion built in 1800 by Colonel Henry Smith, probably a descendant of the first miller, at the crest of the hill overlooking the sweep of land down to the bluffs overlooking the Great Salt Cove. The house was a large, square, three story frame structure with elaborate exterior articulation, including quoined corners, pedimented windows, and a projecting center pediment at the roofline decorated with modillions and supported by consoles. The house was razed in 1926 for the construction of the State Office Building on Smith Street.

Other farms and country retreats on Smith Hill have also long since disappeared, the houses demolished and the land platted into small city houses during the nineteenth century. Thomas Randall Holden--descendant of Randall Holden, one of the founders of Warwick--built a house in the nineteenth century at the northern end of a strip of land between Smith Street and the Woonasquatucket River. The Zachariah Allen family owned the tract of land bounded by Chalkstone, Douglas, Orms, and Smith Streets as well as a large piece directly west of the Holden Estate; their house stood near the corner of Orms Street and Douglas Avenue. The Pickney Farm comprised most of the land on Smith Hill west of the Allen holdings south of Chalkstone Avenue.

While Smith Hill remained scarcely populated, Camp Hill, the site of the present-day Capitol lawns, was popular as a site for military reviews, picnics, outings, and other recreational activity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. No doubt this use prompted Fenner Angell, around the time of the Revolution, to build his two-and-a-half-story, gambrel-roof tavern nearby at the corner of Orms and Davis Streets, its location taking advantage of both the major route to the west and this popular gathering spot. The tavern, which

survived well into the late nineteenth century, achieved notoriety for its rowdy patrons who participated in cockfights, dog fights, and prize fights; further, it was the headquarters in Providence for horse racing, a sport easily accommodated on the gently rolling ground of Camp Hill.

During the early years of the nineteenth century, Camp Hill became known as the Jefferson Plains, reflecting the ardent Jeffersonian Republican politics of Colonel Henry Smith whose large house stood nearby on Smith Street.

In the early nineteenth century, the construction of two turnpikes through Smith Hill augmented the earlier routes north and west. The Douglas Turnpike, chartered in 1805 and opened in 1807, followed the course of the North Branch Road as far as Eaton Street, and thence continued to Douglas, Massachusetts. The Powder Mill Turnpike was chartered in 1810 and opened shortly thereafter: it ran from the North Providence line, then just beyond Holden Street, to Smithfield. The southern end of the Powder Mill Turnpike connected with Smith Street, which had previously ended at the North Providence line. Thus by the early part of the

nineteenth century, the major traffic arteries through Smith Hill were established.

The years of Smith Hill as a rural adjunct to the more developed areas on the East Side and on the Weybosset Side (now downtown) began to reach an end in the mid-nineteenth century. During the next hundred years, approximately from 1830 to 1930, Smith Hill was transformed into the dense urban neighborhood it is today. Two major factors effected this growth: industrialization and immigration.

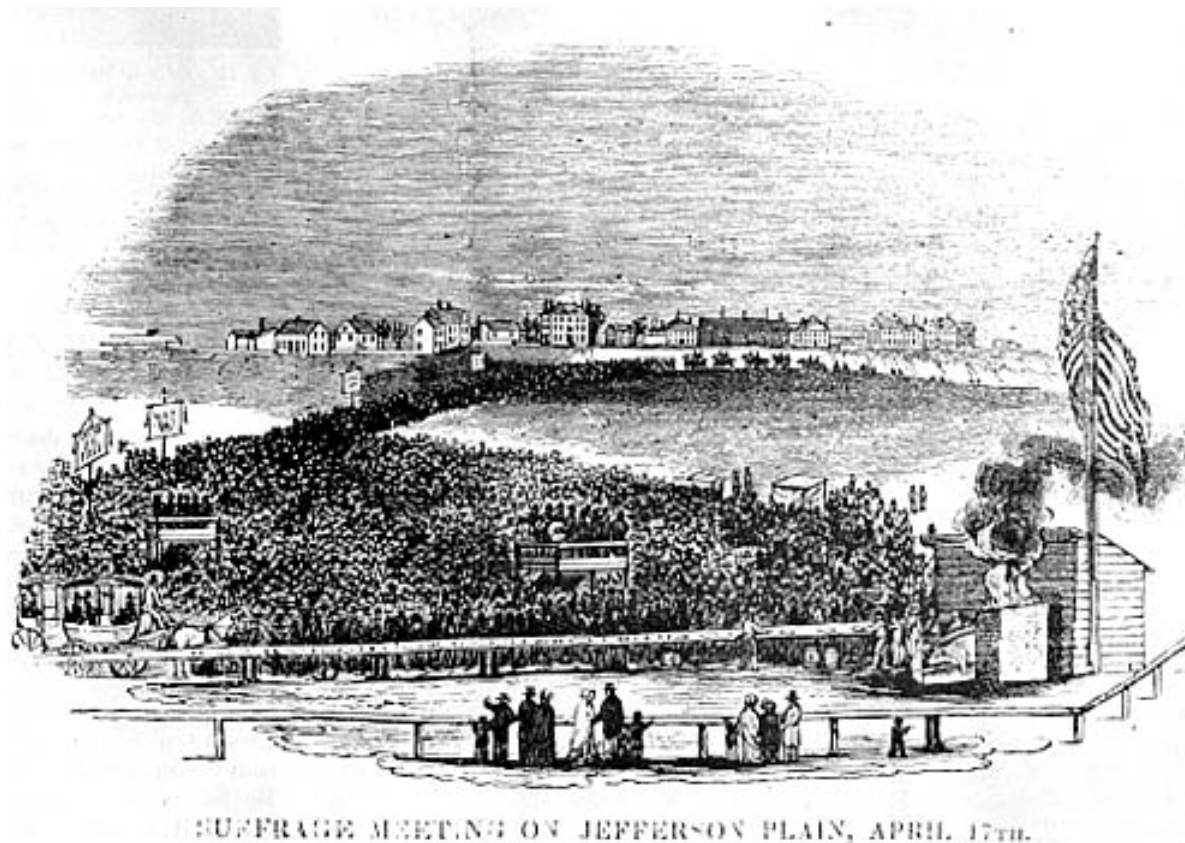


Fig 10: Suffrage Meeting on Jefferson Plain, April 17th; woodcut ca 1842. Drawn from the vantage point on the bluffs on the north side of the Cove, this view shows the open field on Smith Hill and Colonel Smith's house in the background. Courtesy of the [Rhode Island Historical Society](#): RHi x3 2173.

INDUSTRIALIZATION

Since the earliest settlement in Providence, industrialization has played a geographically peripheral, but important, role in the development of Smith Hill. In the seventeenth century, John Smith's mill not only presaged future industrialization along the Moshassuck River but also established the Smith family in the area. Smith Hill itself never became an industrial area, but it owes much of its development to the nineteenth-century industrialization along its borders.

While small industries had grown up in Providence in the eighteenth century, these were strictly ancillary to the shipping trade that supported Providence during these years. The Embargo of 1807 and the War of 1812 severely injured Rhode Island's maritime economy, and the state turned to industry as a means of continuing prosperity. In these years of growth, factories were located near the source of power afforded by the rivers. Early industrial enterprises in Providence were located along the Moshassuck River near Randall Square and on the Woonasquatucket near Olneyville. Both locations had been used for mills in the eighteenth century, and nineteenth-century industrialization spread along the rivers from these points.

Concurrent with and important to this industrialization was the growth of the railroad. By the late 1840s, Providence was connected by rail with Stonington and New York to the south and with Boston to the north, but because of the wide rivers which converged in the Great Salt Cove at Providence's center, through service was impracticable. By the mid-1840s, work had begun to fill a portion of the Great Salt Cove for the creation of the Cove Basin; land claimed on the southern side of the Cove Basin became the site of the first Union Station, completed in 1848. Thus the tracks which now run along the Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck Rivers on the edges of Smith Hill formed a direct rail link from Boston to New York via Providence. The proximity of the railroad not only encouraged incipient industrialization along the rivers, but also spurred residential development on Smith Hill for the many workers associated with the railroads and industry.



Fig. 11: Stillman White Foundry (1856 et seq.); 1 Bark Street.

By the 1830s large, new industries were crowding into the old eighteenth-century manufacturing center along the Moshassuck River near Charles Street. Among these manufacturing enterprises at the eastern edge of Smith Hill were the Franklin Furnace Company, which had located on the Moshassuck River by 1836; Providence Screw Company-later American Screw Company-founded in 1838; Fletcher Manufacturing Company, located on Charles Street in 1840; and the extant Stillman White Foundry, dating from 1856.

Although water continued as an energy source well into the nineteenth century, by the mid-1850s steam power had assumed the primacy it would retain throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. The harnessing of steam power for industrial use made practicable the rapid industrial growth that began in the years just before the Civil War.

The decade 1860-1870 was a period of tremendous industrial growth around Smith Hill, as remaining sites along the rivers filled with factories which thrived particularly as support for the Union effort in the Civil War. Firms such as Burnside Rifle Company and Providence Tool Company manufactured weapons, and many uniforms were made in Providence from Rhode



Fig. 12: Oriental Mill (1861 et seq.); corner of Admiral and Whipple Streets.

Island textiles. One of the first major manufacturers of cotton goods located in Smith Hill in 1860. The Oriental Mill complex at the corner of Whipple and Admiral Streets, remained an important part of the Rhode Island industrial complexes located within Smith Hill, the Oriental Mill, like peripheral industry, aided the residential growth of Smith Hill, as many of its workers lived in nearby cottages.

The advent of the railroad made the undeveloped, eastern end of the Woonasquatucket River Valley particularly attractive for industrial development; adjacent to the river, to the central business district, and to a major east coast transportation link, the area drew a number of new industries as well as established enterprises seeking better locations.

The earliest of those to have a direct impact on Smith Hill was the Burnside Rifle Works, named after Providence's famous Civil War general and founded in 1862 as munitions factory at the corner of Valley and Hemlock Streets. The factory offered work to some residents of Smith Hill but employed more after the company was reorganized as Rhode Island Locomotive Company in 1865 and built the Burnside Row of cottages on Zone Street later in the decade.

Two major Providence factories followed the Burnside Rifle Works to the Woonasquatucket Valley in 1864. The Nicholson File Company (established 1858) moved from quarters downtown to enlarged facilities at Kinsley and Acorn Streets, where it remained until the mid-twentieth century. William Harris, manufacturer of the Harris-Corliss steam engine, opened his machine shop at the corner of Promenade and Park Streets, where it remained into the twentieth century.

In 1870, the nationally prominent Brown and Sharpe Company moved into the first building of its complex at Promenade and Holden Streets, immediately adjacent to the Harris Machine Works. The company, founded in 1833, had developed several important products, such as the vernier caliper (1851), while located in its original quarters on South Main Street. Following its move to Smith Hill, Brown and Sharpe broadened its product line to include such major developments as the Brown and Sharpe Screw Machine, the micrometer caliper, the Universal Milling Machine, and a formed-tooth gear cutter which made possible the mass production of gears. The company continuously expanded its plant to facilitate its increased production, and by the beginning of this century, Brown and Sharpe, whose complex occupied several city blocks, had become the largest single employer of Smith Hill residents. The company's removal to North Kingstown in 1965 was as significant to the decline of Smith Hill as its arrival in 1870 had been to the growth of the area.

Industrial growth along both the Woonasquatucket and Moshassuck Rivers continued apace throughout the nineteenth century and into the third decade of the twentieth century. Those factories established in the 1860s and 1870s grew, and new plants opened such as the Merchants' Cold Storage Warehouse (1893, with additions in 1896 and 1910); the Providence Produce Market (1928); Congdon and Carpenter (1930); and the Coca Cola Bottling Company, first on Smith Street (1917) and later on Pleasant Valley Parkway (1939).

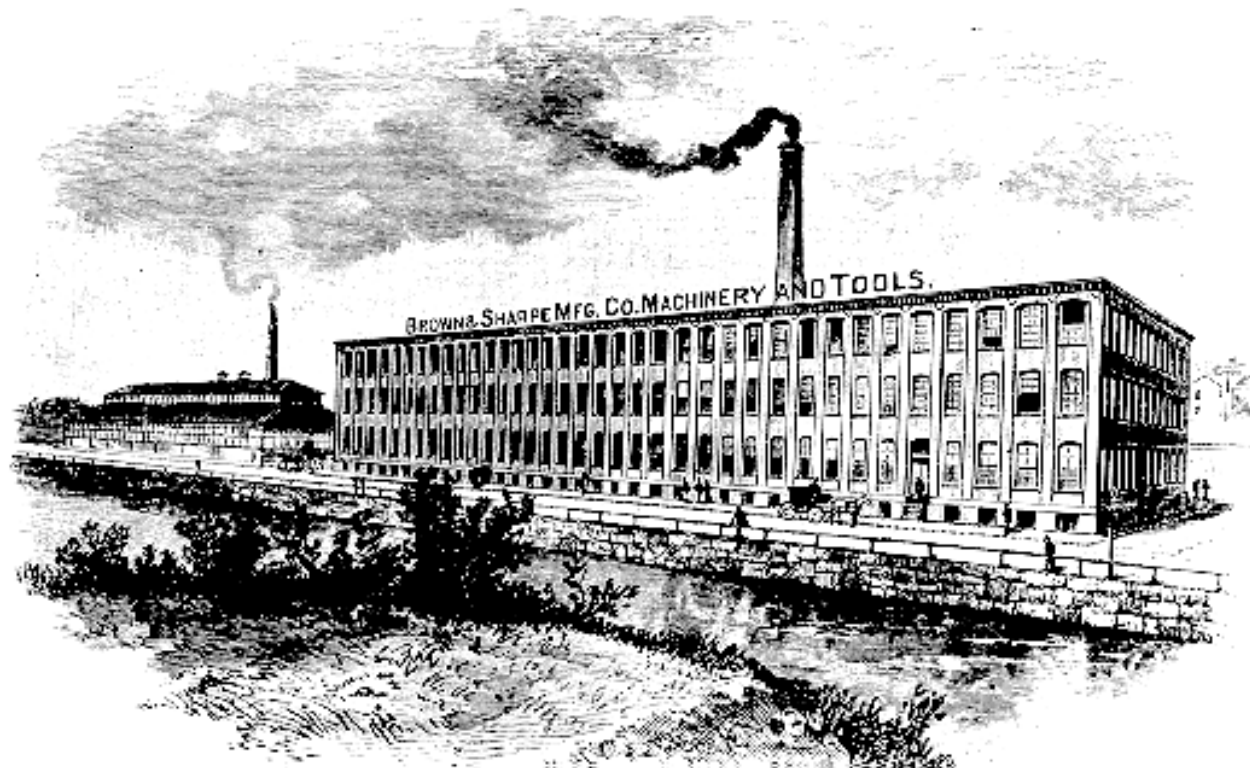


Fig. 13: Brown & Sharpe Complex (1870 et seq.); Promenade at Holden Street; engraving 1886.



Fig. 14: Merchants Cold Storage Warehouse (1893 et seq.); 160 Kinsley Avenue.



Fig. 15: Coca-Cola Bottling Plant (1939); 95 Pleasant Valley Parkway.

IMMIGRATION AND THE GROWTH OF AN ETHNIC NEIGHBORHOOD

Nineteenth-century industrialization was signally supported by and-at the same time-attracted a large part of the immigrant population that began to arrive in Providence by the 1820s. The rapid growth of Smith Hill was fundamentally due to the arrival first of Irish and later in the century of Eastern Europeans and Balkans. These groups contributed significantly to Smith Hill's form and development, both the densely built residential areas and the many institutions that became significant landmarks in the community.

Until the early nineteenth century, Providence was settled almost exclusively by persons of English ancestry. On Smith Hill, middle- and upper-middle-class businessmen and professionals first settled in the area north and west of the Cove in the early and middle nineteenth century. Beginning in the late 1840s, three Protestant congregations-two Baptist and one Episcopal-were established here. As the area changed in composition and the Protestants moved away these churches closed, and only the former Jefferson Street Baptist Church, now Saints Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church, remains from this early Protestant development.

In the early 1820s, a small group of Irish immigrants were involved in the construction of the Blackstone Canal, and by the 1830s a sufficient number of Roman Catholics lived in Providence to constitute the city's first parish, Saints Peter and Paul, which moved several times before its first permanent home was completed in 1838; it became the seat of the Bishop of Providence in 1872.

The first large wave of immigrants were driven from Ireland in the 1840s by the Great Potato Famine, which killed a million persons over a five-year period and drove a million and a half more from their country. While some of the Irish immigrants continued west to less densely populated areas, many stayed in major port cities on the east coast, in New York, Boston, and Providence.

Early in 1841 a political split developed between the Reverend John Corry, pastor of Saints Peter and



Fig. 16: St. Patrick's Church (1842); formerly on State Street. Courtesy of the [Rhode Island Historical Society](#): RHi x3 2076.

Paul, and a group within the parish, the Friends of Ireland, led by Patrick O'Connell, Hugh Duff, and John McCarthy.

On 24 February 1841 the Friends of Ireland wrote to Bishop Fenwick in Boston asking permission to form a second Roman Catholic parish in Providence; and the Bishop agreed the following month.

The committee on buying land for the church examined several alternatives. Possible sites in downtown Providence or on the East Side proved too expensive for the fledgling parish. The site chosen for the new church, Saint Patrick's, on Smith Street at the crest of the hill overlooking the Cove, was selected because the committee "had seen no situation so desirable-either as regards respectability or central location."

The cornerstone for the Gothic Revival structure, designed by the prominent Rhode Island architect Russell Warren, was laid 13 July 1841, and the church, which seated 1250 persons, was dedicated 3 July 1842. The size of the building is indicative of the potential size of the parish, and its further activities manifest the impact that it would have on the area. In 1843, the parish began construction of a school building, and the same year the Reverend William Wiley, the first pastor, bought eight acres of land at the corner of Douglas Avenue and Chad Brown Streets for a parish cemetery. Thus, Saint Patrick's was well established on Smith Hill by the time the Great Potato Famine in Ireland would drive hundreds of thousands of persons across the Atlantic in the 1840s, and parish records indicate a rapid growth: baptisms increased from 69 in 1841 to 326 in 1850.

The presence of the church on Smith Hill near growing industry and inexpensive housing encouraged Irish settlement in Smith Hill. The majority of the early Irish immigrants, many of them unskilled laborers, lived on the fringes of Smith Hill, settling in small, crowded dwellings, some mere shanties, others single-family houses converted into tenements-at the foot of the Jefferson Plains-just north of the Cove Basin-and around the Randall Square area. As individuals acquired skills and greater economic success, they tended to build or to move to more comfortable dwellings away from these slum areas.



Fig. 17: St. Patrick's Church (1916); formerly on Smith Street;



Fig. 18: Convent of the Sisters of Mercy (1872); formerly on Smith Street.



Fig. 19: St. Patrick's School (1871); 19 Davis Street

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Irish community and Saint Patrick's continued to grow. Expanding industry provided a constant source of employment to the proliferating Irish, and the church continued to expand both in parishioners and physical plant. The rectory on State Street (1860) was followed by the school on Davis Street (1871) and the Convent for the Sisters of Mercy (completed the following year, moved to Smith Street ea 1902, and demolished in 1979).

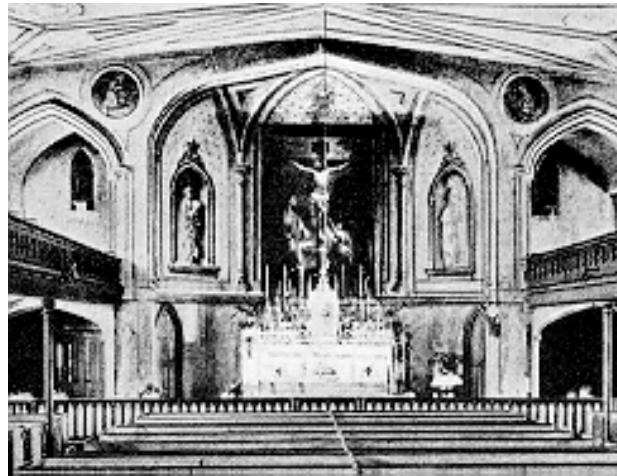


Fig. 20: St. Patrick's Church (1842); formerly on Smith Street; detail of interior. The focal point of the high altar at St. Patrick's in both the 1842 and the 1916 structures was the painting of the Crucifixion, by Gagliardi; executed for the parish in Rome and paid for by parish subscription. The painting was installed behind the high altar early in 1845.

By 1910 Smith Hill was well established as an Irish neighborhood. Many residents were immigrants or their descendants and began to dominate important neighborhood institutions, such as public schools, police and fire stations, and political associations. Approximately half of the teachers, policemen, and firemen on Smith Hill in 1910 were Irish.

Other ethnic groups began to settle in Smith Hill toward the end of the nineteenth century. Several of these continue to retain ties to the area; others have left.

The first of this second wave of immigrants were Jews who came between 1890 and 1920 largely because of increased persecution by the Russian government. A small group of Jewish immigrants had come to Providence from Germany beginning in the 1840s and settled along the eastern border of Smith Hill. By 1877 only three of the one hundred fifty Jewish families in Providence lived in the neighborhood. The immigration of Russian Jews changed the situation; there were 20 families in the mid-1880s, 88 in 1890, and 208 in 1910.



Fig. 21: Congregation of the Sons of Jacob (1920); 24 Douglas Avenue. The opening of this synagogue was greeted with much fanfare, including long processions and days-long festivities involving the whole congregation.

Most of these immigrants located at the eastern end of Chalkstone Avenue around Lopez, Kane, and Rebecca Streets in an older, poorer section near the railroad tracks and Moshassuck River industry. The Irish who had come to this area in the 1840s were by then moving to more comfortable dwellings farther west as they achieved some prosperity as new areas were developed.

The Jewish presence in the eastern part of Smith Hill was almost immediately reinforced by the creation of several synagogues. The earliest in the area were the Congregation of the Sons of Zion (1892) on Orms Street and the Society of Russian Jews (1896) on Chalkstone Avenue; neither remains.

In 1906, the Congregation of the Sons of Jacob, largely Russian, occupied the first story of their new house of worship at 24 Douglas Avenue. The building was enlarged in 1912, and the superstructure finally completed in 1920. It is the only remaining testimony of the once large Jewish community in the eastern part of Smith Hill.



Fig. 22: Jefferson Street Baptist Church, now Saints Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church (1868); 60 Jefferson Street.

After 1890, domination, oppression, and ultimately massacres at the hands of the Turks forced many Armenians, like the Russian Jews, to flee their homeland. They joined a small group of their compatriots who already lived in the eastern part of Smith Hill in modest dwellings along Orms Street and Douglas Avenue. This settlement created the nucleus of the Armenian community that remains on Smith Hill today, and its rapid growth and consolidation is exemplified by the growth of the neighborhood church.

For the growing number of exiled Armenians, the church was the only institution that remained to



Fig. 23: Gloria Dei Lutheran Church (1928); 15 Hayes Street.

perpetuate their culture. Thus the need became acute for a place of worship and a community center.

In 1913, the congregation was able to purchase the facilities of the Jefferson Street Baptist Church, a simple Victorian Gothic structure, and dedicated it as Saints Sahag and Mesrob Armenian Apostolic Church the following year, obtaining a permanent foothold on Irish-dominated Smith Hill.

While the Armenians established a permanent settlement on Smith Hill and have remained in the area as a distinct ethnic force, the Swedes, who settled in the area beginning in the 1880s, have largely dispersed. Because

of the droughts that plagued the country in the late nineteenth century, Swedes emigrated in large numbers in the 1880s. Those who remained in Providence—rather than moving farther west like many of their compatriots—formed Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in 1890 and erected its first sanctuary on Hayes Street. The congregation expanded rapidly, and by the mid-1920s was able to begin construction on the present edifice, which incorporates traditional Scandinavian motifs with contemporarily popular Art Deco forms. The growth of the state government and the construction of Interstate Highway 95 have displaced many communicants from the immediate neighborhood, but the congregation remains strong and active, drawing from a wide geographical area.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

The transformation of Smith Hill from a sparsely populated rural adjunct at the beginning of the nineteenth century to a congested residential neighborhood by 1920 was effected through the division into house lots of large tracts of land originally used as farms or suburban retreats. While the building boom which rapidly changed the face of Smith Hill began only in the late 1870s, the first intensive land speculation and urban development had commenced in the 1830s.

The first major plat of house lots was offered for sale by Jesse Metcalf as the Smith Hill Plat of 1830, an area of approximately seventy house lots north of Smith Street and west of Davis Street, including Jefferson Street and part of Holden Street. The popularity of this area is evinced by the number of dwellings erected by the 1850s, some fifty-five in all—very few survive. The plat's proximity both to the older residential neighborhood on the East Side and to the central business district, its relatively inexpensive land, and the growth of Irish immigration in the 1840s account for its early success. The early residents of the Smith Hill Plat were generally prosperous members of the middle class. Many were involved in mercantile pursuits or held minor managerial positions in the developing industrial economy. Nelson C. Northup, whose house still stands at 17 Jefferson Street, is typical of the early residents: long involved in the grocery business, he prospered and eventually went into real-estate speculation. John B. Hennessey, an Irish immigrant who also achieved success as a grocer, built the spacious house for his large family at 19 Mulberry Street.

A second, smaller plat of house lots on Smith Hill was offered for sale by David Burt and Albert H. Snow in 1843 along Holden Street between Smith and Orms Streets. A handful of structures were built on this plat, but these have been almost entirely replaced by subsequent development. Still remaining is the dwelling at 216 Orms Street, built by Amos D. Yeomans in 1845.

Both the Edward A. Bush Plat, north of the intersection of Chalkstone and Douglas Avenues, and the Philip W. Martin Estate Plat, west of the intersection of Chalkstone and Charles Street, opened in 1843.

They were densely built by 1857, but subsequent industrialization and urban renewal have eliminated the small dwellings from these areas.

In 1847, the Allen family first divided the large area bounded by Smith Street, Orms Street, Douglas Avenue, and Chalkstone Avenue into house lots. Because of its isolation from more densely settled parts of Providence, little building activity occurred before the Civil War, although near the corner of Chalkstone and Douglas Avenues stood a small cluster of pre-1860 houses, most of which were demolished in the 1960s. Following his death in 1850, Thomas Randall Holden's Smith Hill estate was divided among his heirs and platted into house lots. While at least two of his heirs built investment properties on their land (27-29 and 44 Jewett Street), most of the land was sold for house lots, and a number of large, stylish residences was constricted. When the Holden Estate was divided, the land to its west was largely undeveloped, and the Woonasquatucket River was free of industry. The area thus offered an almost rural setting and proximity to the growing central business district. This combination proved attractive to prosperous members of the business community who wanted more spacious surroundings than those available close to downtown on the East Side. By the Civil War, a number of substantial houses had been built on both sides of Park Street and on the cross streets between Park and Holden Streets, including the William G. R. Mowry House (1856) at 57 Brownell Street and the Christopher G. Dodge House (1858) at 11 Westpark Street.

The westernmost pre-Civil War settlement occurred on the A. C. Hawes & Brother Plat of 1854. Soon after the thirty-five lots bounded by Orms, Smith, and Duke Streets were offered for sale, a number of dwellings were erected on or moved to this area. Many of these are extant, including the Sheffield Smith House (1855) at 334 Smith Street and the mid-eighteenth-century house moved by Patrick Denahy to 10 Esten Street around 1857.

The Hardenburg Purchase Plat of 1856 was less immediately successful as a new development, probably because of the relative remoteness of its

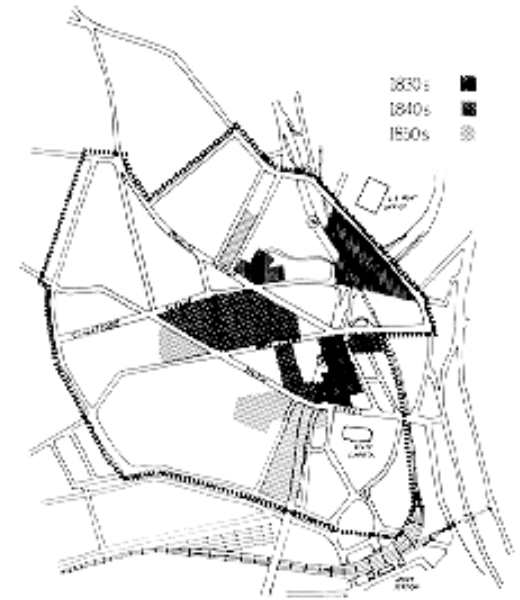


Fig. 24: Map showing development of Smith Hill before 1860; dates on parcels indicate the opening of these areas and platting into house lots.

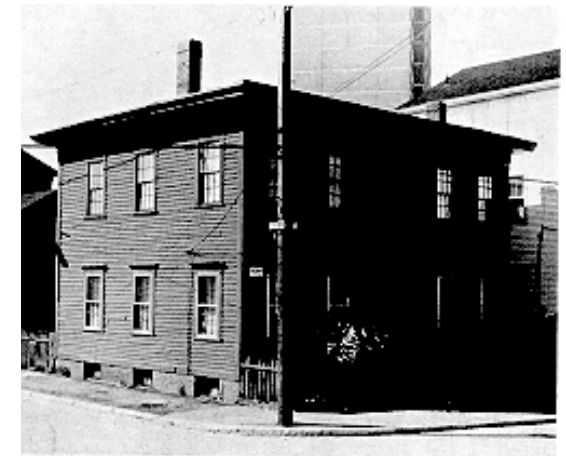


Fig. 25: Yeomans-Oldfield House (1845); 216 Orms Street.

western location: north of the intersection of Chalkstone Avenue and Smith Street, along Camden, Danforth, and Clara Streets. At least one of the early dwellings on the Hardenburg Plat remains; the Erastus N. Steere House (1856), built by the developer of the area, still stands, though heavily altered, at 511 Chalkstone Avenue.

Between 1860 and 1890, real-estate development expanded as growing industry and immigration placed increasing demands upon the area for housing, and numerous plats were opened for sale of house lots. These major plats include: a further division of the Allen Estate of 1847 and a division of Allen family land south of Smith Street along Calverly Street in 1861; the Thomas Davis and George L. Clarke Plat bounded by Candace Street and Douglas and Chalkstone Avenues in 1861; the Oaklands Estate Plat of Sarah B. Eaton, a division of the Eaton family estate which lay east of River Avenue and west of the Hardenburg Purchase Plat, divided into several plats offered for sale beginning in 1871; the Douglas and Hardenburg Plat, bounded by Douglas Avenue and Camden and Vale Streets, in 1871; the Second Davis and Clarke Plat, bounded by Alma, Pekin and Candace Streets and Douglas Avenue, in 1872; the Thomas Davis Plat, west of Holden Street, south of Jewett Street, in 1879; and the Phoebe Young Heirs Plat, bounded by Smith and Young Streets and Chalkstone Avenue, in 1885.

Most of these areas filled with small cottages or increasingly toward the end of the century-multiple-family dwellings. The one exception was the Oaklands Estate Plat, which was sufficiently far removed from the densely populated areas when first platted that it became the site of several comfortable single-family dwellings; however, as the population grew, westward expansion on Smith Hill brought many multiple-family dwellings.

The last plats opened for residential development are along the western edge of Smith Hill. The Mason and Okie Plat—bounded by Chalkstone Avenue, Pleasant Valley Parkway, Valley Street, and Zone Street—was divided into house lots which were first offered for sale in 1887; small lots lined these streets and two new streets opened at this time, Ayrault and

Felix. Frank Waterman surveyed and platted the last remaining portion of the Pinckney Farm house lots in 1905. This tract comprised the land south of Orms Street, west of the intersection of Orms and Smith Streets, and north of Okie Street. Both of these areas had filled with multiple-family dwellings by 1925.

Nineteenth-century westward expansion of the neighborhood was facilitated by the development of public transportation. The first horsecars began operation in Providence in 1864, and by the early 1880s, Smith Hill was served by routes along Chalkstone Avenue and Smith Street. By 1900, horsecars had been replaced by trolleys, and routes had been added on Charles and Admiral Streets and Douglas Avenue, providing service on most major thoroughfares through the neighborhood.



Fig. 26: Charles Dowler House (1872); 581 Smith Street. This mansard-roof dwelling is a typical 1870s form. Few houses of this type and quality remain in the city today in such a well-preserved state.

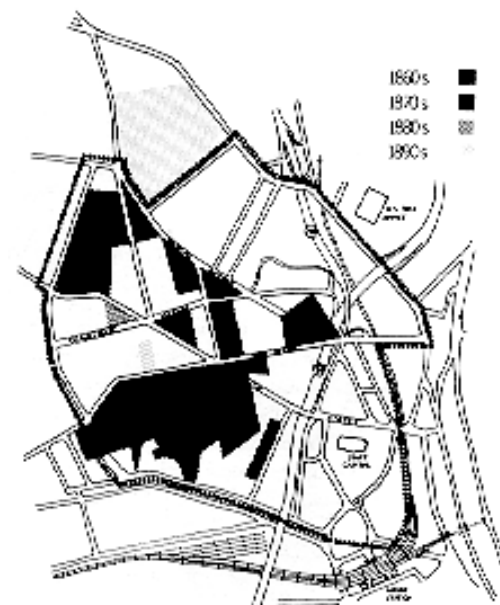


Fig. 27: Map showing development of Smith Hill between 1860 and 1890; dates on parcels indicate the opening of these areas and plating into house lots.



Fig. 28: Niles B. Schubarth House 1 (1872); 49 Common Street. The interior organization of this type changed little in the nineteenth century, but here a modish mansard roof bespoke modernity.

ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The rapid nineteenth- and early twentieth- century growth of Smith Hill is best seen in the homogeneity of its architecture. Little was built before 1800, and only two eighteenth-century houses remain. Several fine examples of mid-nineteenth-century architectural styles survive, representing the first urbanization of the neighborhood. The majority of the structures on Smith Hill are multiple-family dwellings built between 1875 and 1925, and these buildings amply represent the evolution of common southern New England urban house types.

When Smith Hill first began to grow in the late 1830s, Providence architecture had entered a late Federal phase. The simple, vernacular, single-family houses erected then, such as the small house at 60 Davis Street, have all the earmarks of the style, including delicacy of proportion and trim, an elliptical fanlight over the doorway, and a hip roof with monitor.

By the 1840s the taste for Greek Revival had superseded the Federal. Based on the architecture of ancient Greece, the style introduced more massive detailing and proportions to American architecture. The use of a portico temple front with columns the height of the building-the hallmark of the style-was rare in Providence where most of these houses used a Greek-inspired entrance porch and wide pilasters instead of cornerboards. Few such houses remain on Smith Hill, but they illustrate typical Providence vernacular forms, such as the two-and-a-half-story Jonathan Tucker House (ca 1850) at 206 Smith Street or the smaller story-and-a-half Horace Crossman House (ca 1847) at 162 Orms Street.

After 1850, the Italianate style, loosely derived from the architecture of the Italian Renaissance, began to replace the Greek Revival. There was, however, a fairly long transitional period, during with Greek Revival houses were dressed up in the latest Italianate trim. The Nelson C. Northup House (1853) at 17 Jefferson Street is a fine, well preserved example of this transitional mode: the solid two-and-a-half-story block, set gable end to the street on a high granite basement, retains the form of the Greek Revival, but quoins



Fig. 29: House (ca 1830 et seq); 60 Davis Street. The portion at left is part of the original monitor-on-hip-roof section.



Fig. 30: House (ca 1830 et seq); 60 Davis Street. Front elevation, showing addition at left.



Fig. 31: Jonathan Tucker House (ca 1851); 206 Smith Street. Alterations in the late 19th century included shingling that covers the corner boards.

decorate the raking and eaves cornices, and an octagonal cupola dominates the roof. The finest exemplar of its type in Providence, it has been approved for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.



Fig 32: Nelson C. Northup House (1853); 17 Jefferson Street.

At the time some builders were combining elements of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles in their buildings, fully developed Italianate houses were beginning to rise on Smith Hill. There were chiefly two



Fig. 35: Patrick Shanley House (ca 1860); 65 Bernon St.

types: the palazzo and the villa style. The forms of both the John G. Hennessey House (ca 1855) at 19 Mulberry Street and the Christopher G. Dodge House (1858) at 11 Westpark Street approach that of the monumental Italian Renaissance palazzo, cubical in massing and crowned with a low hip roof with wide eaves. The Dodge House, the most impressive Italianate dwelling on Smith Hill, sits on a high granite basement, with its central entrance reached by twin staircases. The Mowry-Nicholson House (1856) was built in the villa style: its picturesque cruciform plan and broad verandas were eminently suited to the semirural site on the hillside overlooking the Woonasquatucket River. The integration of design and location clearly followed the tenets of Andrew Jackson Downing, the prominent mid-nineteenth-century theoretician and architect, as expressed in *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850). Modified by William T. Nicholson in the 1860s and 1870s, the house reflects changing demands of both style and function in what was by then becoming an urban area adjacent to incipient industry along the river.

These large, stylish houses were complemented on Smith Hill by a number of modest, vernacular types. While many of these early dwellings have disappeared, several remain as examples of lower- and middle-class



Fig. 34: Mowry-Nicholson House (1856 et seq); 57 Brownell Street.

housing. The Charles G. Arnold House, built between 1849 and 1855 at 55 Bernon Street, is a simple residence used as an investment property, typical of the extremely plain, speculatively built cottages. The Patrick Shanley House (ca 1860) at 65 Bernon Street employs a standard nineteenth-century format for vernacular dwellings in Providence: two-and-a-half stories, gable roof set end to the street, and a three-bay facade with side-hall plan. Shanley, a carpenter, was probably involved in the



Fig. 35: Patrick Shanley House (ca 1860); 65 Bernon St.

construction of his house, and the flaring roof line may reflect his handiwork. Joseph Baker's one-and-a-half-story, center-entrance house (ca 1864) at 37 Bernon Street relies on a standard early nineteenth-century format but is embellished by round-head recessed panels in the corner pilasters and fine bracketed detailing in the bay windows that flank the hooded center entrance.

During the 1860s, the Italianate style gave way to a vogue for architecture emulating that of contemporary France during the reign of Emperor Napoleon III. The Second Empire Style, like the preceding Italianate phase, made use of a monumental building block articulated with boldly modeled, classically derived, decorative elements; but its primary characteristic is the mansard roof. The Second Empire Style survived into the late 1870s as a highstyle form and lingered into the 1880s and 1890s in vernacular, two-family dwellings.

Perhaps the most splendid of the Second Empire houses on Smith Hill is that built by Niles Bierragaard Schubarth, the prominent Providence landscape architect, at 47 Common Street in 1874. The central entrance is emphasized by the sunbonnet dormer in the mansard and flanked by two-story bay windows. The original granite steps and wrought-iron fence remain of the original landscaping treatment.

Fig. 36: Niles B. Schubarth House II (1874); 49 Common Street; demolished, 1980.



Fig. 37: Dickhaut Heirs Cottages (ca 1897); 6-8 Duke Street.

The usefulness of the Second Empire's mansard roof, which allowed a full third story in the attic space, made it attractive in multiple-family dwellings of the 1880s; but the relatively great expense of framing a mansard roof, rather than a simple gable, limited its popularity on the mass-housing market.

The character of Smith Hill as a working-class neighborhood was fully established in the post-Civil War years. To accommodate the rapidly growing population, a large number of dwellings were constructed. The Smith Hill building boom was noted in an 1883 Providence Journal article:

The Tenth Ward [part of Smith Hill] continues to grow more rapidly than any other section of the city. In this ward both the amount invested and the number of buildings erected are larger than in any other of the nine wards.*

*Providence Journal, 1 January 1883

Many of these were constructed by real-estate developers, but owner-occupied houses-and especially

owner-occupied multiple-family dwellings-were also constructed as residents of the area achieved some financial prosperity. New housing during these years took three forms; single-family cottages; two-and-a-half-story, two-family dwellings; and three-deckers.

A number of small, single-family cottages were erected in the late nineteenth century, a continuation of the trend begun before the Civil War. Many were built in groups as rental property by individual developers, and their plain, unadorned cottages show little variety, either among themselves or from group to group. The few owner-occupied cottages were usually embellished with decorative detailing, such as the Robert Arnett House (1871) at 37 Violet Street and the Charles Kelley House (ca 1875) at 51 Camden Avenue.

Four major clusters of small, one-and-a-half-story cottages set gable end to the street were constructed in the last two decades of the nineteenth century by perhaps the heaviest investor in Smith Hill real estate, Andrew Dickhaut. Dickhaut was a private investor, with no connection with any of the large industrial

concerns that employed most of his tenants. The earliest of these workers' cottages were eight built on Fillmore Street in 1881; five of them remain at 39, 47, 55, 57, and 59 Fillmore Street. The best preserved, 39 Fillmore Street, retains the low picket fence typical of the period of construction.

In 1883, Dickhaut completed a group of eleven houses (identical to those on Fillmore Street) from 115 to 141 Bath Street just north of Orms Street. This, the most intact group of workers' cottages from the late nineteenth century remaining in Providence, has been approved for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Seven buildings, mirror images of those on Bath and Fillmore Streets, were constructed by Dickhaut in 1891 from 55 to 73 Lydia Street. The last group, built by Dickhaut's heirs, rose on Duke Street in 1897. These seven, at 6 through 18 Duke Street, are similar in form to the earlier structures, but differ by the addition of a porch and bay window across the front of the building in place of the simple three-bay facade.

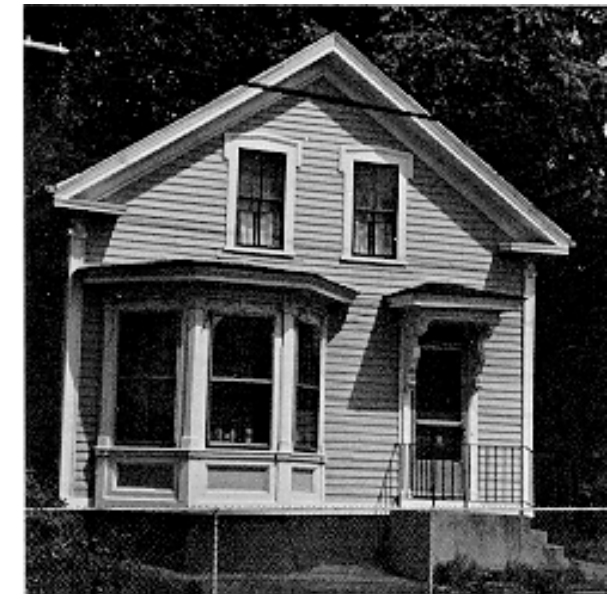


Fig. 38: Charles Kelley House (ca 1875); 51 Camden Avenue.



Fig. 39: Burnside Row (1866-1867); Zone Street.

The frame, two-and-a-half story, two-family house with gable roof set end to the street is a classic and pervasive house type in southern New England cities and very common in Rhode Island; Smith Hill retains a fine collection of these dwellings, the best in Providence. The earliest were simple, with a three-bay

facade and minimal decorative trim. Late nineteenth-century architectural trends toward varied massing and picturesque effects are reflected in the larger, later versions of the two-family house: bay windows, larger porches, cross-gable roofs, and turrets were added with increasing frequency in the last two decades of the

The earliest of these workers' dwellings on Smith Hill is the Burnside Row, sixteen houses erected on Zone Street in 1868 by the owners of the Rhode Island Locomotive Works (formerly Burnside Rifle Works), which was located nearby on Kinsley Avenue. The corporate involvement was unusual, and the grouping of such a large number of identical units of multi-family housing by a single developer was exceptional on Smith Hill until the rapid proliferation of three-deckers around the turn of the century.

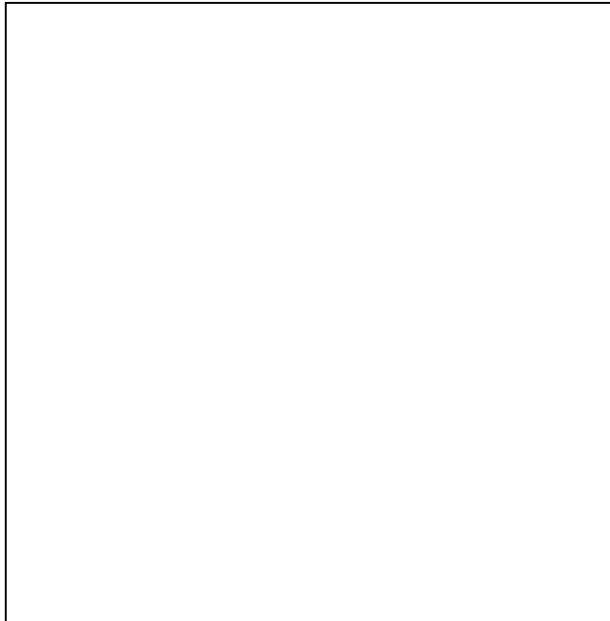
By the early 1880s the pace of Smith Hill development quickened noticeably, and whole blocks of houses mostly of the two-and-a-half-story, two-family type rose rapidly as developers sold off house lots on the newly opened plats.



Fig. 40: Burnside Row (1866-1867); Zone Street. Detail of hooded doorway.

Much of the building activity of this period centered in the Second Davis and Clarke Plat, bounded by Douglas Avenue and Pekin, Alma, and Candace Streets. The area retains most of the two -family houses built there in the 1880s: the northern side of Alma Street, for example, contains five identical houses built in 1883, with a sixth added in 1887. The density of the extant urban fabric and its importance to the development of Smith Hill commends this district's nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Toward the end of the 1880s, a larger version of the multi-family house came into fashion on Smith Hill. These houses filled-in lots on streets opened earlier in the century and lined previously undeveloped streets, such as Chalkstone Avenue west of Smith Street. The Elisee J. Bourneuf House (1892), at 660-662 Chalkstone Avenues typical of these later multi-family houses: a front porch replaces the small stoop, bay windows sprout on the walls of the structure, and the high cross-gable roof provides additional living space.



Continued population growth abetted by the second wave of immigrants in the late nineteenth century increased the demand for housing on Smith Hill. The three-decker satisfied this demand by using more intensively the remaining vacant land on Smith Hill. A three-story building with one apartment to each floor and front porches extending the height of the building, it proliferated in southern New England cities between 1890 and 1930.

While the detailing of the three-decker followed the stylistic vagaries of local architectural trends over the course of its popularity, its basic form underwent little change, for it is a building type rather than a particular style. In plan, the building follows the format established by the earliest multiple family house, with rooms arranged in a double-barrel shotgun fashion. Within this basic format, variety was achieved in size, with units ranging from two to four bedrooms.

The three-decker was almost the only type of housing built on the newly opened Mason and Okie and Pinckney Farms Plats, but it was not limited to these areas. Formerly undeveloped lots in more established sections were filled with three-deckers-sometimes two to a lot during this period; Goddard and Bernon Streets were thus filled.

The construction of three-deckers was almost entirely limited to speculative builders who erected large numbers of them in concentrated areas. This particular approach to real-estate development produced rows of identical three-deckers. In architectural terms,

the best concentration in Providence occurs on Smith Hill along Oakland Avenue and its side streets between Smith and Eaton Streets-here the monumentality of the three decker is most apparent, in these long rows of closely serried structures. By 1916, the rapidly increasing number of three-deckers filling Providence working-class neighborhoods prompted significant criticism of the type. It offered little however, by way of a realistic solution to the crowded living situation. To recognize the importance of the type to Providence's heritage, the Oakland Avenue Historic District has been approved for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

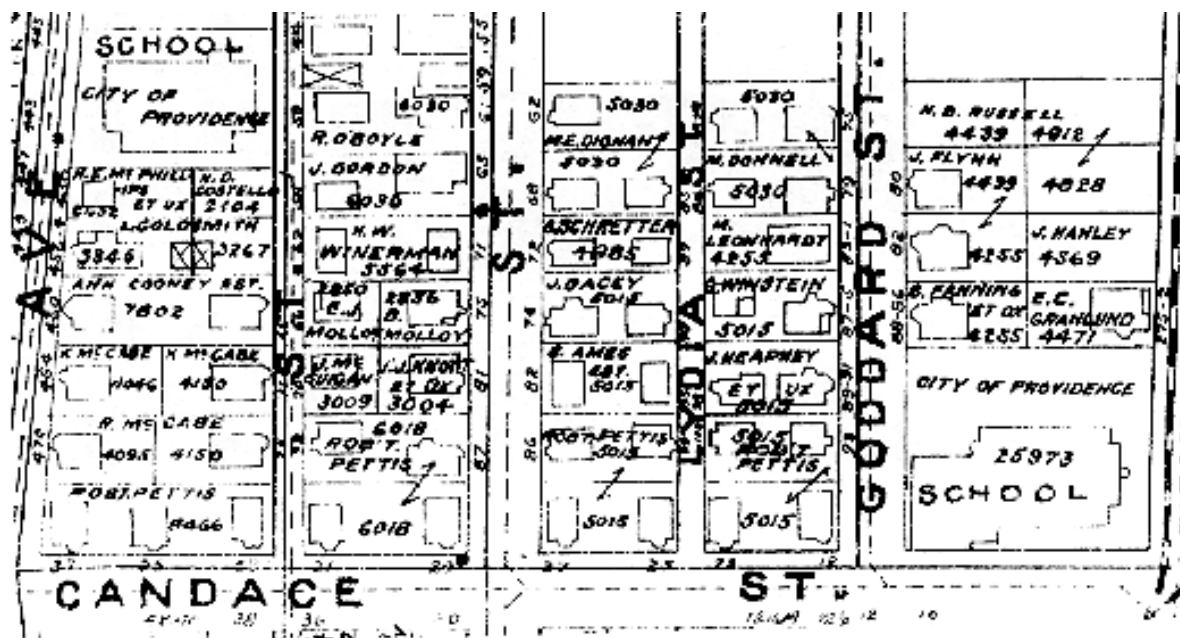


Fig. 43: Goddard and Bernon Streets as shown on the 1908 Street Map of Providence. Courtesy of the [Rhode Island Historical Society](#): RHi x3 2734.

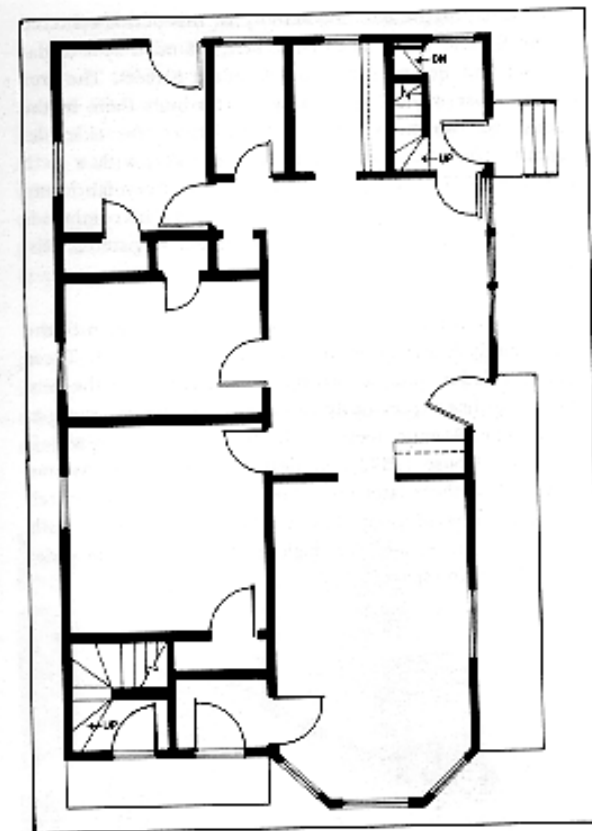


Fig. 44: Typical plan of a triple-decker.